

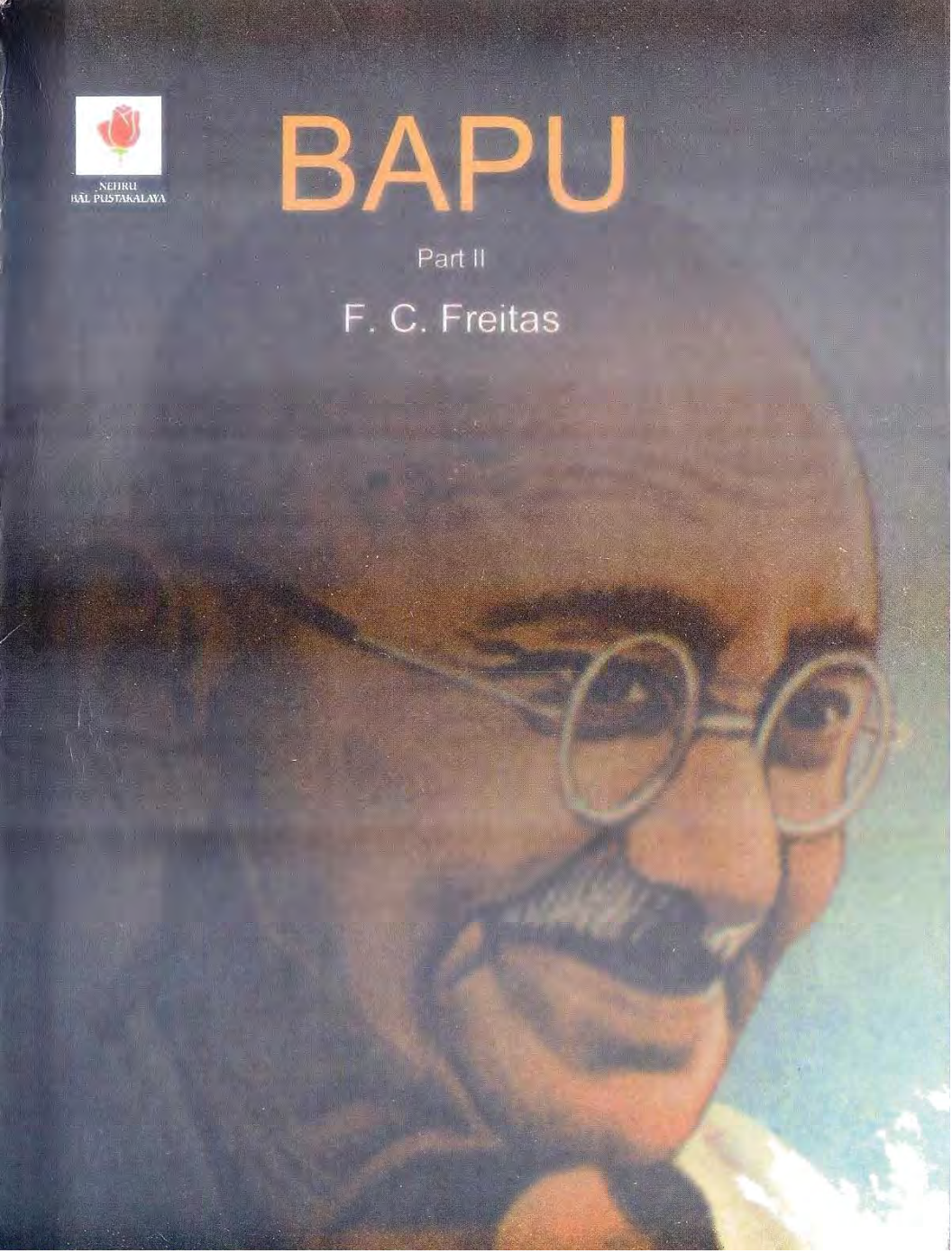


NETRU
BAL PUSTAKALAYA

BAPU

Part II

F. C. Freitas



Nehru Bal Pl/stakalaya

BAPU

[PART II]

WRITTEN AND ILLUSTRATED BY

F. C. FREITAS



NATIONAL BOOK TRUST, INDIA



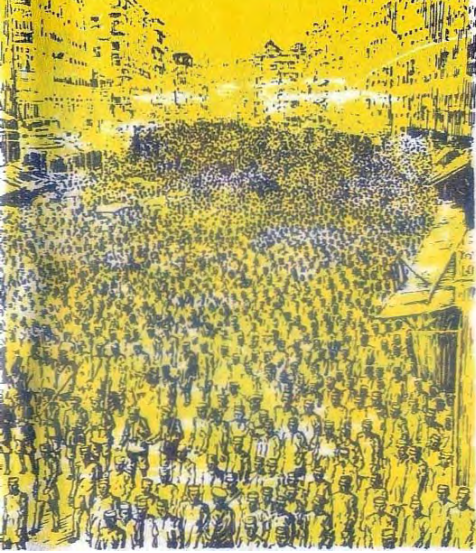
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Gandhiji led the Salt Satyagraha and was arrested; in protest a complete *hartal* was observed all over India. Though violence broke out in some towns, the civil disobedience movement was generally peaceful.

In Bombay there seemed to be two governments. The Europeans and the Indian soldiers were loyal to the British, while all the rest followed the Con-

gress. *Hartals* were observed every week.

At a moment's notice, all the shops in the city were closed and the streets were filled with thousands of men and women. Complete silence reigned. A Congress permit was necessary for any movement. White-clad figures led processions, singing patriotic songs. All wore home-spun Khadi.

Indians could no more accept British rule.

Lord Irwin wished to have talks with Gandhiji to arrive at some settlement. So he ordered on January 25 the unconditional release of Gandhiji and all the members of the Congress Executive, so that they could have full discussions among themselves. On January 26, 1931, Gandhiji and other leaders were released. When repression continued, Gandhiji proposed heart-to-heart talks with the Viceroy.



After meeting at Allahabad on February 6, the Congress leaders decided on a **compromise** and authorised Gandhi to **negotiate** a settlement as a representative of **the party**.

There were some who opposed this move. Churchill said; "It is alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceregal palace, while he is still organising and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor."

As a result of the parleys, which were begun on February 17, agreement was finally arrived at. Known as the Gandhi-Irwin Pact, it was signed at Delhi on March 5. The talks were conducted in a friendly manner and even with much sweetness. But the officials were hostile and serious differences soon began to crop up. Sastri, Sapru and Jayakar,

Liberal leaders, intervened and appealed to both parties not to adopt a rigid attitude, but to try and understand each other. So Gandhiji decided to discontinue his civil disobedience movement.

According to the Pact, (1) the movement was to be discontinued; (2) the Congress was to participate in all deliberations of the forthcoming Round Table Conference for the purpose of drafting a constitution for India on the basis of a Federation, responsibility and adjustments and safeguards; (3) not to press for an enquiry into police excesses in various parts of the country.

On his part, the Viceroy agreed to release simultaneously all political prisoners arrested in connection with the Civil Disobedience movement; to restore all confiscated property including land; to withdraw all emergency ordinances; to allow people to make salt free of duty and to permit peaceful picketing of liquor, opium and foreign-cloth shops. The last item was designed as an encouragement to the Swadeshi movement.

On August 27, 1931, Gandhiji, Pandit Malaviya and Mrs. Naidu sailed for London to attend the Round Table Conference. It had been called to draw up a suitable plan for the future of India. Representatives of Indian princes, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, Parsis and other groups attended.

Those who went with him included his secretaries Mahadev



Desai and Pyarelal, his son Devdas and Miraben. He was inundated **with** congratulatory messages from friends and **well-wishers**. As was his wont, he spun, read **books** and wrote letters, etc., on board the ship. He also took walks on the deck. As his first love was children, he soon made friends with European boys and girls. At every port of



call, people welcomed him and wished him well.

After many weary weeks, nothing was accomplished. Gandhiji wanted to transform slavery into complete freedom. All that had been suggested at the conference, Gandhiji found unacceptable.

He summed it up thus: "You tell me that I am to be the master in my own house, but you keep the key of the safe, and you station a sentry at the door."

An agreement was reached at the conference, reserving seats in the legislatures for religious groups, landowners, businessmen and others. Members would be elected **only** by their own communities.





Gandhiji felt disheartened, for out of such a division, no national government could emerge. His most successful work was outside the conference. As he considered himself and lived like a poor man, he stopped at Kingsley Hall in the poor **quarter** of East End in London. He was the guest of Miss 'Muriel Lester. He went to attend the Round Table Conference at St. James's Palace, quite a distance from where he stayed and yet he chose to live among poor Londoners, though this meant some

inconvenience to him.

His happiest experience was a week-end he spent in Lancashire. Because of the boycott of foreign cloth in India, many workers in cotton mills there had become jobless. He told them about the poverty and sufferings of his own countrymen. They understood him and were won over by him.



Gandhiji addressed **many** groups, gave numerous interviews. He met the King, Lloyd George, Charlie Chaplin, Bernard Shaw, Sir Samuel Hoare and others.

While he was in England even, he did not give up his old habit of going for his early morning walks. Despite the great cold there, he wore only a wrap, sandals without socks- and no coat. He had been referred to often by critics as a "half-naked fakir" and yet it was such a fakir who was received by the King and Queen of England.

What delighted him most was his meeting with children. They too loved him and were attracted by his gentleness and kindness. On his birthday, they brought with them lovely gifts for poor children in India. He valued these above all else he had received in England.

When he was leaving London, the toys were the only things he took with him.

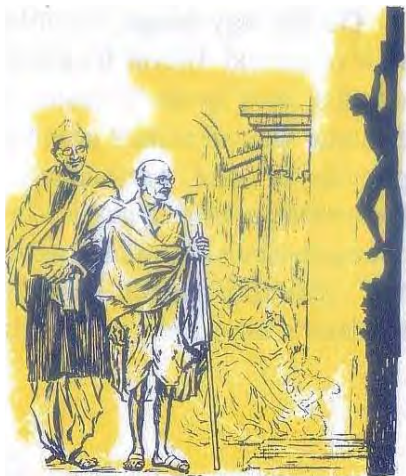
He thanked the people in general. "**All** this hospitality, all this kindness, will never be effaced from my memory, no matter what befalls my unhappy land," he said.

On his way home, Gandhiji broke his journey to pay a visit to an old friend Romain Rolland, the famous French novelist and lover of India, at his villa on Lake Geneva. Rolland was an ardent admirer of our culture, literature and philosophy and particularly of saints like Ramakrishna Paramhansa and Swami Vivekananda. The two pals exchanged views on many matters including India's freedom and Gandhiji spent some of his happiest days here. Rolland's biography of Gandhi is very famous.



On the way home Gandhiji visited Rome's famous Sistine Chapel. When he stood before the crucifix, his eyes were filled with tears.

He landed in Bombay on December 28, 1931. That evening he addressed his largest audience at Azad Maidan. He gave details of the London talks





and explained why they had failed. "I had hoped", he said, "it would be possible to find a way to co-operate with the Government. I will even now do my best to find a way out."

But Lord Willingdon, the Viceroy, was not interested in that. Ordinances were promulgated and thousands of arrests made.

The Congress called upon the nation to resume civil disobedience. On January 4, 1932, Gandhiji was arrested in Bombay. As it was his day of silence, he wrote out messages to his colleagues and friends in England.

As the movement gathered momentum, the Government let loose a reign of terror; the Congress and other related organisations were declared illegal and their assets confiscated.

The Government arrested Congressmen, seized property, buildings and printing presses. Processions were banned.

These measures, according to Winston Churchill, were 'more drastic than any that were required since the Mutiny'. Civil disobedience continued despite this. Tax payment was resisted in Gujarat and the United Provinces, forestry rules

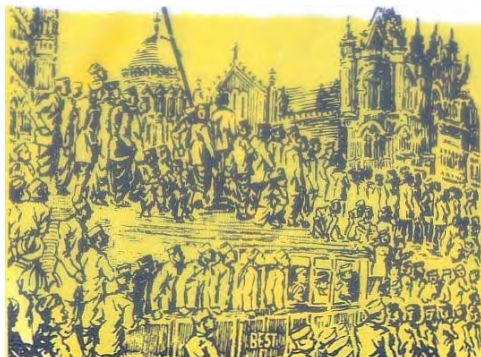


and salt monopoly were defied, and boycott of foreign cloth was carried on.

Lathis were used at unauthorised meetings and processions. Special police toured rebellious areas, huge fines were imposed. In January alone, nearly 15,000 persons had been arrested. By the end of the year about 67,000 people were convicted.

Jawaharlal Nehru was already in jail. Kasturba too followed him there.

As on all previous occasions, Gandhiji used his jail period to good purpose. He turned to the problem of "untouchables" — the sweepers, scavengers, tanners and others who suffered and were treated badly because they were looked down upon by other Hindus.



Gandhiji called them "Harijans", men of God. (Later that year he gave the name Harijan to his new weekly paper). "The most despised people are the most favoured of God," he said.

What worried him most was that the Government wanted to separate them from the Hindus by giving them as a group the right to elect their own Parliament representatives. They would, thus, remain separate, segregated and not be absorbed in society.



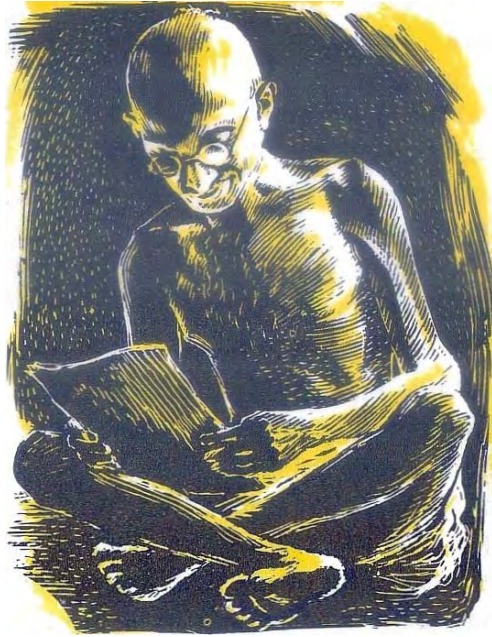
Gandhiji wrote to Sir Samuel Hoare pleading against this. His appeal fell on deaf ears and the Government announced its decision. Gandhiji began a **fast** unto death in protest on September 20, 1932. Kasturba was transferred to Yervada to be with him.



By the third day, his condition became serious. Leaders of various communities, including Dr. Ambedkar, a Harijan leader, met and a settlement was reached. Gandhiji accepted it and the famous Yervada Pact was signed. The Government agreed to the terms and the fast was broken. A conference resolution said that "henceforth among Hindus, no one shall be regarded as an untouchable by reason of his birth".

While in England for the Round Table Conference, Gandhiji had **done** his best to vindicate the oneness of Hinduism and now he was prepared to lay down his life for it. He had declared: "We do not want the untouchables to be classified as a separate class. Sikhs may remain as such in perpetuity. So may the Muslims and the Europeans. Will the untouchables remain untouchables in perpetuity? I would far rather that Hinduism died than untouchability lived."

The path was not very easy. Gandhiji had started campaigning for equality for Harijans in every **respect**, but found lack of support even among his own followers.



He wrote forcefully in *Harijan*, the new weekly he had started. The Harijan Sevak Sangh was founded. **It** did much useful work later on.

For some days, he had been distressed by the general indifference shown by people to his work. On May 7, 1933, he had an unusual experience. At midnight he suddenly woke up feeling that a voice was telling him to go on fast for twenty-one days. **It** ordered him to begin the fast the very next day. He quietly went back to sleep and announced his decision to begin the fast next morning. He could not be dissuaded from it.

Gandhiji was released on the first day of his fast, lest the Government be faced with the possibility of his death in jail.

His fast became for him "an uninterrupted twenty-one days' prayer". It helped him to stir the caste-bound Hindus to shame and move towards breaking the resistance of religion.

Gandhiji continued his campaign for the untouchables along with the struggle for independence. For him freedom meant freedom from superstition, ignorance and from foreign domination.





An unquestioned leader of the Indian people, he captured the imagination of the whole nation. Never before had such a many-sided genius assumed leadership. The illiterate millions understood him and were willing to follow him without question.

Gandhiji was no ordinary politician. He used no oratory or dramatic flourish. He persuaded his listeners with simple words, a gentle voice and appealing arguments. Often, he moved them through his plain sincerity and tactfulness.

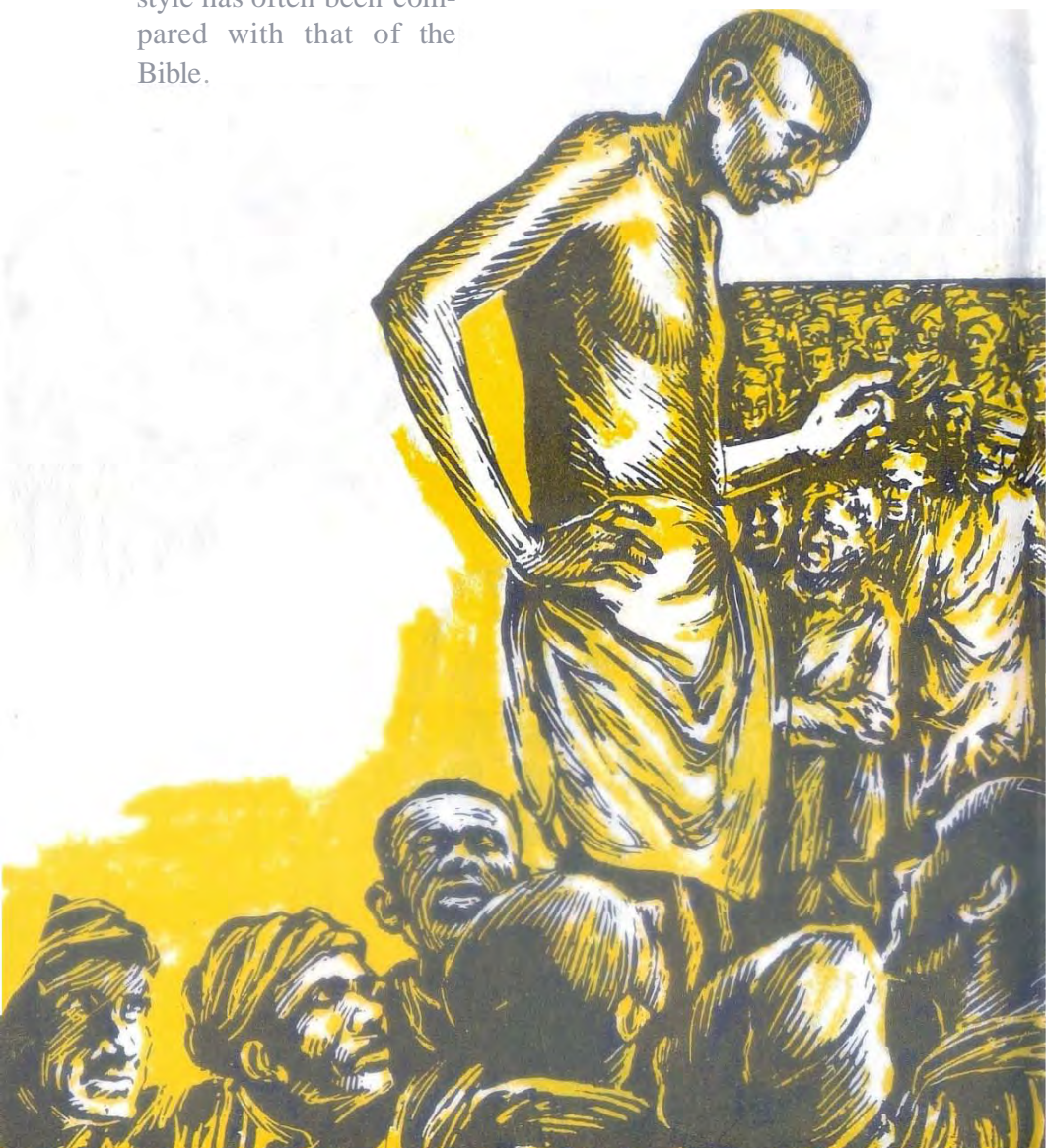
He played the roles of a reformer, humorist, moralist and politician. With shrewd diplomacy he brought about an awakening that amazed even the British.

When he spoke or wrote in English, his language was fluent and effortless, and yet simple enough to convey his meaning to everyone. He is regarded as a master of the





English language and his direct and unembellished style has often been compared with that of the Bible.



Often he undertook self-punishing fasts to test his own beliefs and to project his arguments, to shame those who had failed to accept the truth.

Despite his many fasts, he felt that the hearts of the people still needed to be changed. After recovering his strength at the Wardha Ashram, he set out on a tour of the country on November 7, 1933.

Wherever he went, he spoke to **huge** crowds which some-





times had waited for him for hours. For 10 months he covered villages and towns. He was offered money for his cause and collected Rs. 8 lakhs, much of it given in coppers by poor peasants. Often women offered their **personal** jewellery.

Choirs sang calling Harijans brothers. Orthodox Hindus and Harijans sat at feast together. Institutions agreed to give Harijans free education. Temples and schools were thrown open to them.

Gandhiji also felt that Harijans had to learn to live in a cleaner manner. Only then would they be acceptable. He patiently taught them a healthier way to live. He cleaned latrines one day and opened temples the next.

He had to overcome many difficulties and face much hardship. Even Harijan leaders suspected



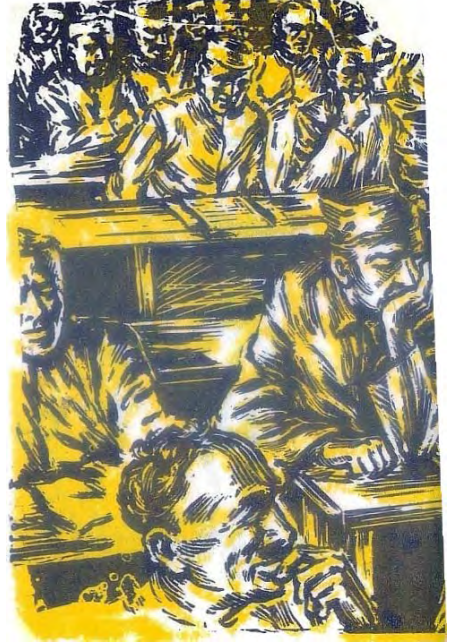


hi m. But he carried on undaunted.' A new way of thinking began to spread through the land.

In January, 1934, Bihar suffered from a terrible earthquake. Thousands were killed. Relief and reconstruction work was **needed**, mostly in the villages. When Gandhiji saw the destruction, he felt that all change should be centred round the Indian village.

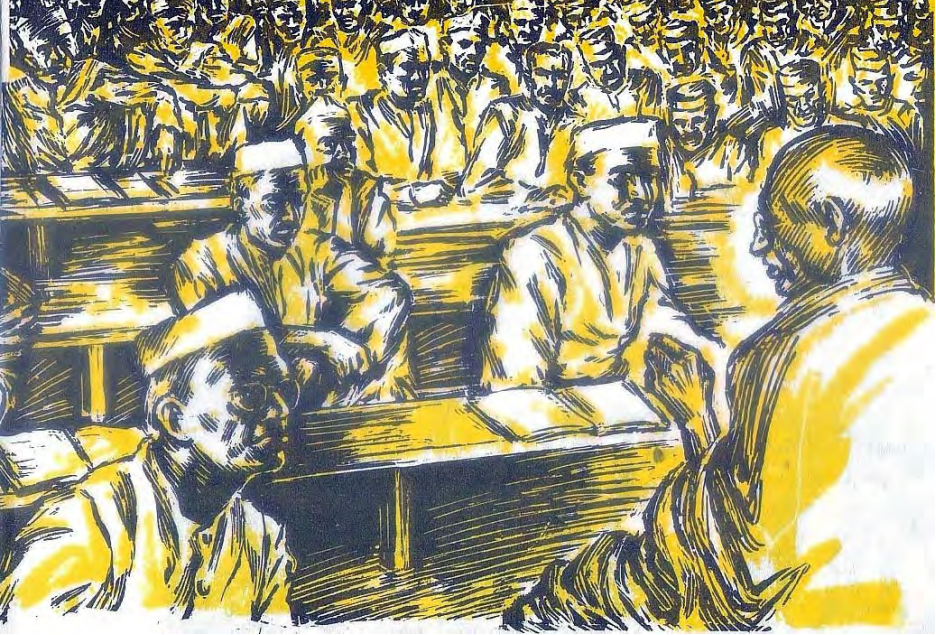
In October, he resigned from the Congress and soon buried himself in village uplift work. The new Ashram at Wardha became his headquarters. With Vinoba Bhave, Mahadev Desai, Miraben and Kasturba, he set up rural industries, cleared roads and dug garbage pits.

At his persuasion, the December, 1936 **Congress** session was held in the village of Faizpur. Jawaharlal Nehru became the Congress President. All this paved the way for village reconstruction work.



In the 1937 elections, the Congress scored sweeping victories: In seven provinces, it had the majority and later on it controlled nine out of eleven provinces.

Gandhiji suggested many reforms. He considered manual labour to be most important in the process of learning. The All-India Education Conference at Wardha accepted his ideas.



Then, once again, his health broke down and he had to take rest in Bombay. He loved to play with children on the **Juhu** beach.

He then visited the Frontier Province and that cheered him. Led by Ghaffar Khan, known as the Frontier Gandhi, the proud tribesmen had accepted complete non-violence and formed a peace army called the Red Shirts.





While the Congress continued to seek Gandhiji's advice, the leadership of the organisation underwent changes. Other events drew his attention. The people in the princely states were agitating for freedom. One of the bigger trouble spots was Rajkot, whose Thakore was supported by other princes. An earlier agreement made by the Thakore with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel was not honoured. Civil disobedience was suppressed ; "outsiders" were not allowed to enter the state.

Gandhiji was not well. Kasturba, who hailed from Rajkot, insisted on joining the campaign. Attempts to dissuade her failed. On February 3, 1939, she entered the city and was arrested. This resulted in numerous clashes and many more arrests. Gandhiji kept his ill-health a secret

and went to Rajkot. He tried for a settlement, but the Thakore was adamant. On March 3, he resolved to begin a fast unto death. This caused great concern to his friends, colleagues and admirers.

On March 5, Kasturba was brought to see him. He asked if the other women arrested with her had been freed. They had not been released, so he sent Kasturba back to jail. He told her not to accept special treatment.

His condition became serious. He could not take even a sip of water. The end seemed near. The Viceroy asked Sir Maurice Gwyer, Chief Justice of India, to arbitrate. The Thakore agreed and Gandhiji broke his fast.

Sir Maurice found that the agreement the Thakore had signed earlier had not been honoured. A new agreement was then signed.





The ruler did **not** strictly adhere to the terms of the agreement. He **even organised** an agitation against Gandhiji.

At one prayer-meeting, several hundred demonstrators waved black flags and tried to break up the meeting. They went up to Gandhiji and surrounded him. He refused to let his friends form a protective cordon. "I shall sit here or go alone in their midst," he said firmly.

As he stood up, he was suddenly **seized** by terrible pain in the back. He closed his eyes and sought relief through prayer. Soon strength surged through him and he opened his eyes. He asked to be left at the mercy of the crowd.

He called the leader of the gang and said that he was at his disposal. The violence melted like ice and the leader offered to lend Gandhiji support on his way home. That evening, he walked all the way, one hand on the shoulder of one who had come to hurt **him!**

In September, 1939, the second World War began. Without consulting the nation's leaders, the Viceroy made India join the war. The Congress admitted that Germany was to be condemned, but the decision should have been taken by the Indian people.

It was made clear that only a free India could decide its own destiny. If Britain needed such help it should promise India some real freedom. The Viceroy promised in August, 1940 to give Indians the right to draw up a new constitution. But it would be subject to the approval of the princes and the Muslims. The offer was rejected.

In October, Gandhiji launched satyagraha. With the





arrest of top leaders, many people joined the movement. All echoed his slogan: "It is wrong to help the British war effort with men or money. The only worthwhile effort is to resist all war with non-violent resistance."

In a few months, 20,000 had been convicted with 14,000 people in jail at one time.

When the Japanese threat loomed large, Britain wanted to seek some settlement. In March, 1942, Sir Stafford Cripps, a British Cabinet Minister, was sent with another offer to Indian leaders. But the mission was a complete failure.

Gandhiji said: "I had heard rumours about the contents of the British Government's offer he brought to India, but I had not seen the offer. He gave it to me and after a brief study I said to him: 'Why did you come, if this is what you have to offer? I would advise you to take the first plane home.' Cripps replied, 'I will consider that'."

The other leaders were also disappointed. The new plan permitted any Indian state or province to reject the new constitution. This meant that India would be permanently divided. Also the plan did not give Indians full control of the Government.

It was at this time that Gandhiji thought of the 'Quit India' resolution. He said later: **"It** was the Cripps' fiasco that inspired the idea. Hardly had he gone, when it seized hold of me... My first feeling was : 'We need an answer to Cripps' failure.'"

On July 14, 1942, the Congress Working Committee met **at** Wardha and passed the 'Quit India' resolution. Gandhiji drafted it himself.

The resolution demanded that British rule in India must end at once. **If** it did not, the Congress would use "all the non-violent **strength it has** gathered since 1920", in order to assert its right to self-determination.

On August 8, the All-India Congress Committee met at Gowalia Tank Maidan, Bombay, and fully supported the 'Quit India' resolution. It gave a call for the "starting of a mass struggle on non-violent lines on the widest possible scale." **The**



struggle would be conducted under the leadership of Gandhiji.

Gandhiji told the meeting: "I take up my task of leading you in this struggle, not as your commander, not as your controller, but as the humble servant of you all; and he who serves best becomes the chief among them."

This was a great moment, a turning-point in India's history. All the leaders of the party were at the famous Gowalia Tank Maidan meeting. There were some who had



resigned earlier but the whole Congress body was now ready to fight and win freedom.

Huge crowds had gathered outside the *pandal*. There was tension everywhere; and yet, the nation was filled with **high** expectations.

The crowd cheered the leaders and was ready to do anything at their call. Gandhiji, however, had not yet

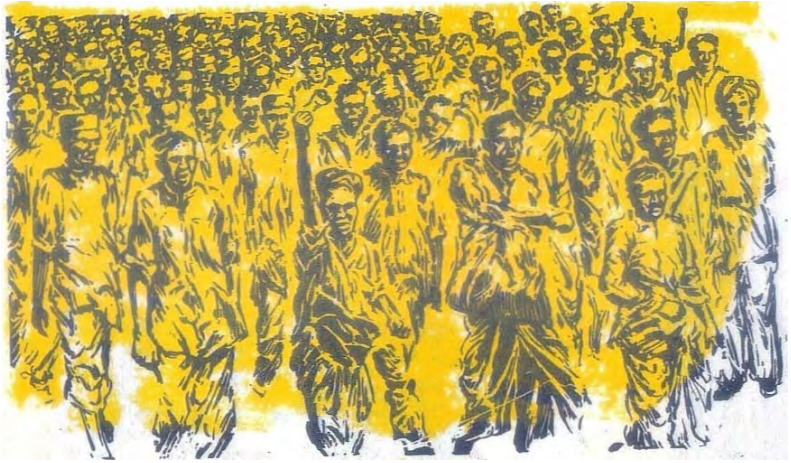




'given the call to start the movement. But the *British Government* did not leave them in peace. Without provocation, orders were given to explode tear-gas shells to scatter the crowds and to fill their hearts with fear. It was also an indication of what was in store for those who would join the struggle.

Early next morning, the Government arrested Gandhiji and other prominent members of the Congress. Gandhiji was taken to the Aga Khan Palace at **Poona**, where he spent nearly two years as a prisoner. With him was Kasturba.

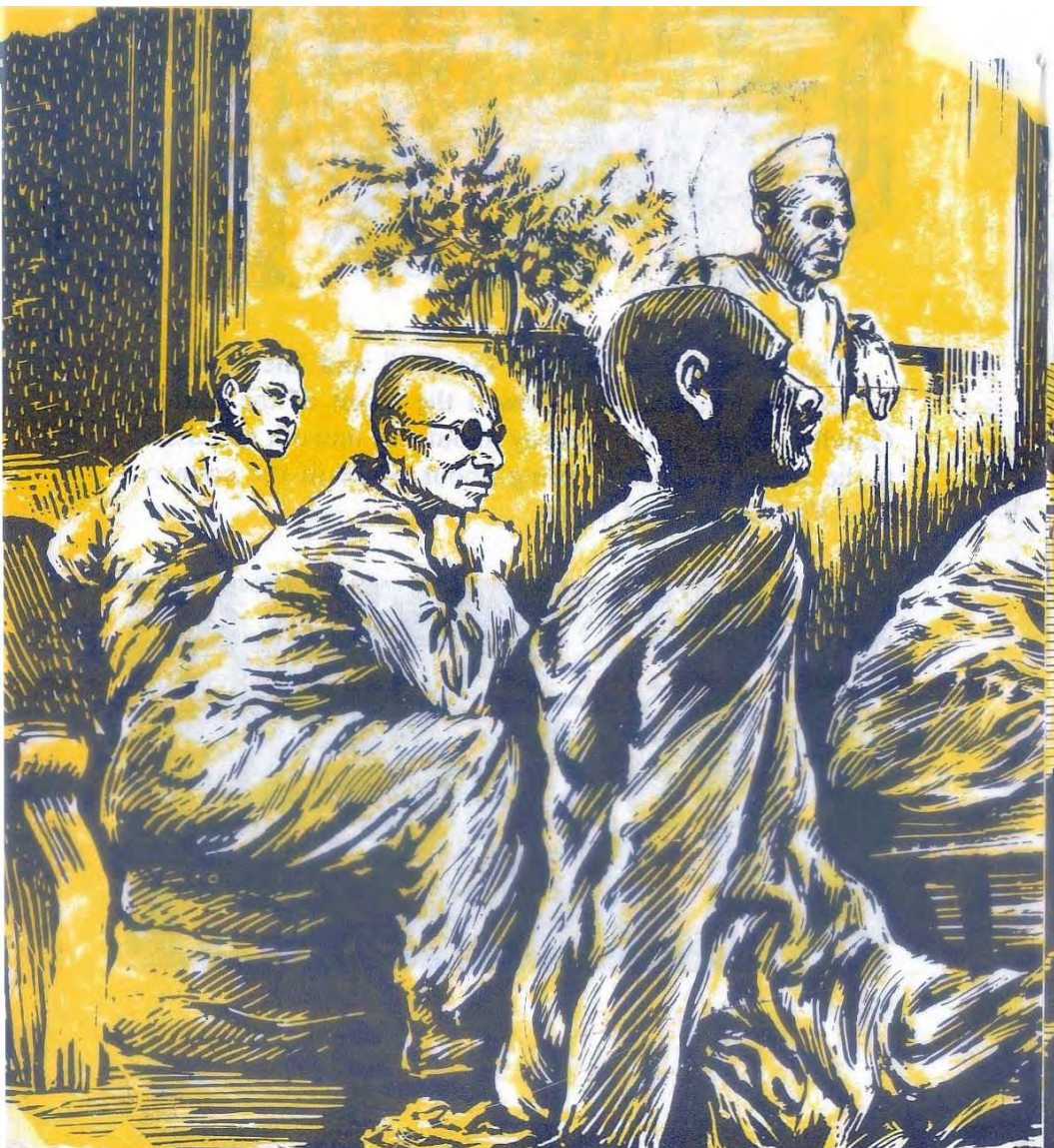
As the news of Gandhiji's **arrest** spread over the land, rebellion broke out. Terrorists and others not connected with the Congress joined in. The Government answered with brutal violence. Unarmed groups were mercilessly beaten; guns were freely used and those caught were flogged savagely and thrown into underground cells without any trial.



The Government blamed Gandhiji and the Congress for all the trouble that followed the arrest of the leaders. Gandhiji wrote to the Viceroy about this untruth and asked to be freed in order to bring about peace in the country. The Viceroy did not reply.

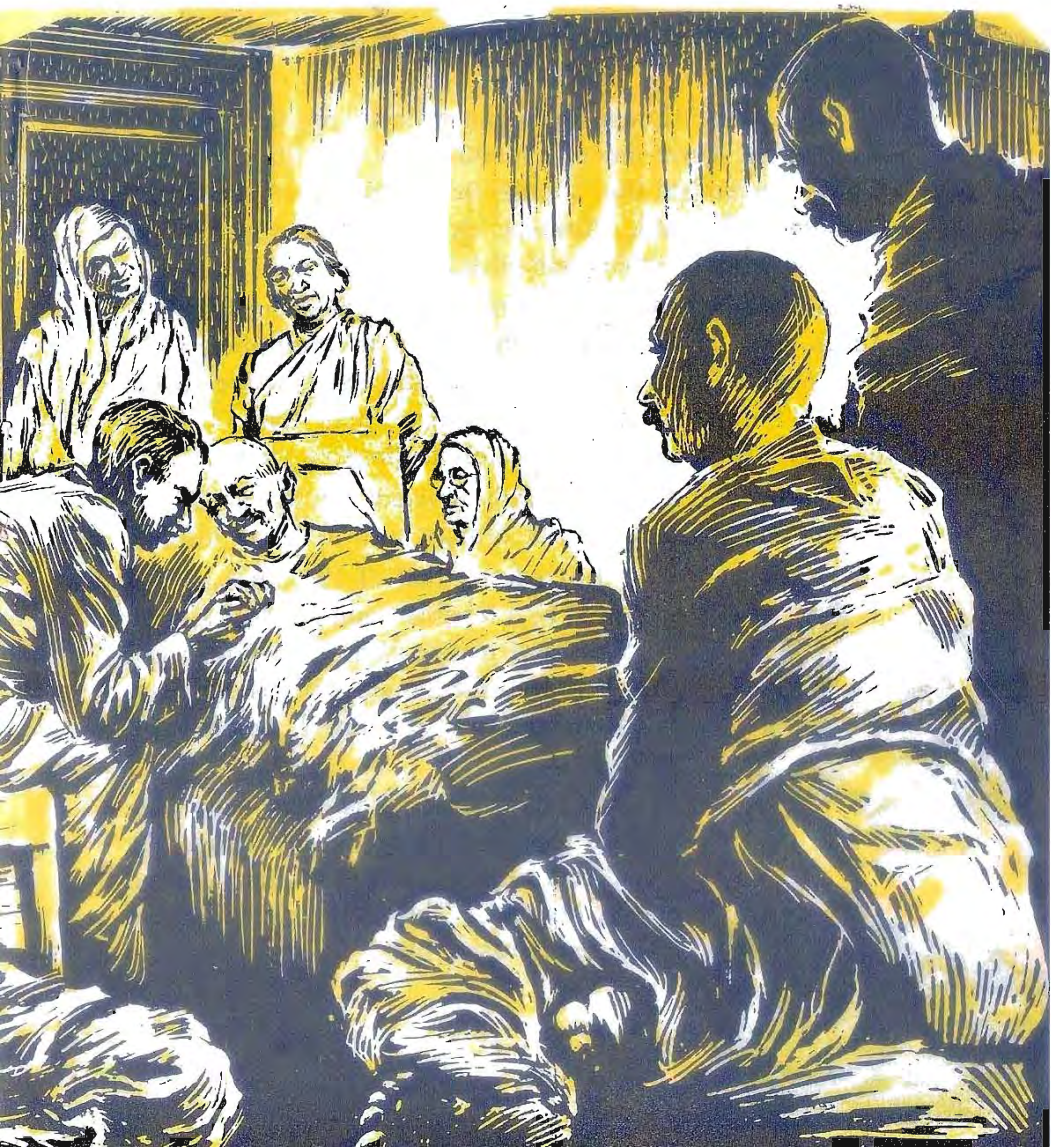


He wrote again in December pleading that the truth be told, otherwise he would be forced to use the satyagraha method. This was to "crucify the flesh by fasting".



“My wish is not to fast unto death,” he said, “but to survive the ordeal of the fast if God so wills.”

On February 18, 1943, after breakfast, he began a 21-



day fast. By the seventh day, Gandhiji's health began to cause anxiety. He could not sleep properly and became very weak. Two days later, the doctors feared that he might die.

All over the country, there were protests, processions, and prayers.

Many Englishmen, including eminent people, protested against the Government's treatment of Gandhiji. Bernard Shaw condemned the "mental defectiveness" of the King's cabinet. Churchill, however, continued to approve the "police action" against demonstrators.

According to official records, the police opened fire 470 times, and the military 68 times. Up to December, 1942, over 60,000 Indians had been arrested, 39,000 were still in jail in February, 1943. No wonder, then, that Gandhiji described the Government action as "leonine violence".

To the relief of all, Gandhiji survived. On March 3, Kasturba handed him a glass of orange juice to break his fast.

In the latter half of 1943, Bengal was visited by a terrible famine. No less than 15 lakhs of people died. Gandhiji wished to help feed the hungry, but his offer was rejected and he continued to remain a prisoner.

In the palace, Kasturba, who was also in jail with Gandhiji, lay dying. She had two heart-attacks in November, and then another. The Government decided against releasing her.





On February 22, 1944, she died, aged 75. She was a remarkable woman and had been a companion of Gandhiji for over 60 years. Her death in detention aroused deep feeling throughout the country. A hundred friends gathered in the grounds of the palace and paid tribute to her memory when her funeral rites were being performed.

As a symbol of the deep regard people had for Kasturba, a memorial fund was raised. It was utilized for the welfare of women and children in rural India.

Soon after this, Gandhiji fell ill and Lord Wavell, the new Viceroy, released him on May 6.

After only a short period of recovery and rest, he began talks with the Viceroy on relations between India and Britain. Then he met M. A. Jinnah to evolve a common and acceptable approach. In this he was helped by C. Rajagopalachari. India eagerly awaited the outcome; the 'nation's



future depended on it. The talks did bear fruit.

Many negotiations took place. The Muslim League, led by Jinnah, continued to insist that there should be a separate Muslim State called Pakistan.

In March, 1946, the British Government sent three Cabinet Ministers to frame a constitution to help India decide her future.

An interim Government was formed on September 2, and Jawaharlal Nehru became the first Prime Minister. Gandhiji was of course consulted at every stage.

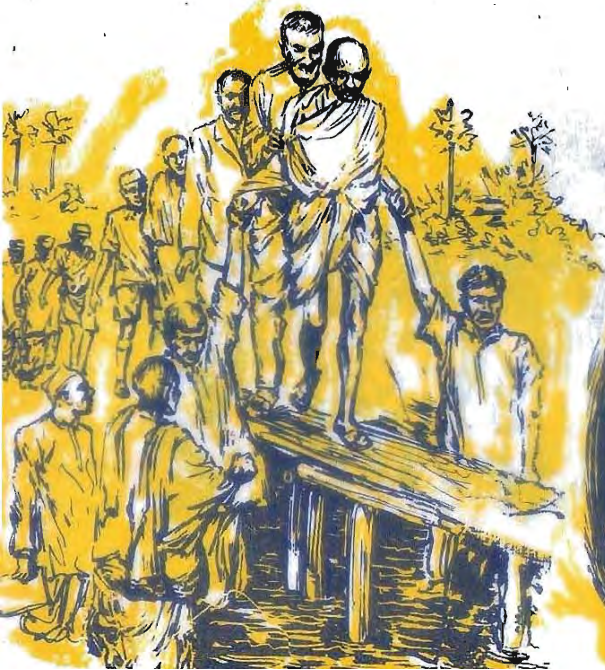
The Muslim League claimed that it alone could nominate Muslims. Jinnah refused to co-operate. The League had already had a Direct Action Day on August 16 and had instructed that black flags be **hoisted** on September 2.



Riots broke out on August 16 in Calcutta and about 5000 people were killed. Trouble spread to other parts of the country too. Gandhiji soon went to Calcutta to try and bring about peace.

Later, however, the Muslim League joined the Government. Nehru and Abdur Rab Nishtar, a Muslim League Minister, also visited Calcutta at this time.





When Gandhiji was in Calcutta, news came in of Hindus being killed in Noakhali and Tipperah in Bengal. That the outrage should have taken place in the villages pained him more. If hatred entered the countryside, it would mean the end of the nation, he feared.

Though his health was poor, he went to Noakhali.

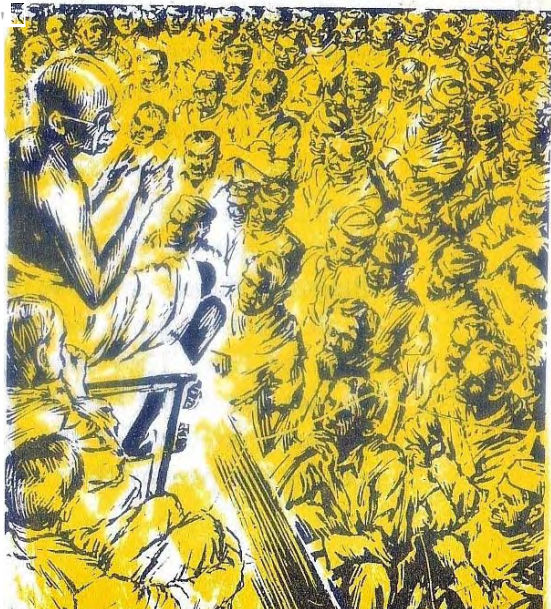
He visited 49 villages between November, 1946 and **March**, 1947. Often he walked barefoot, as it was a 'pilgrimage of penance for him', for all the violence that had taken place.

When he heard about disturbances in Bihar, he went there, this time to help the Muslims who had been attacked.

On August 6, 1945, an atom bomb was dropped on Hiroshima and another on Nagasaki on **August 9**. The mushroom cloud from the bomb rose miles in the air and could be seen for nearly 200 miles around. The two cities were completely destroyed and the Japanese surrendered.

Gandhiji declared, "...non-violence is the only thing that is left in the field. It is the only thing that the atom bomb cannot destroy..."

It is interesting to note that Albert Einstein, one of the world's greatest scientists, praised Gandhiji thus: "...Generations to come, it may be, will scarce believe that such a one as this ever in





flesh and blood walked upon this earth."

Gandhiji was invited to address the Inter-Asian Relations Conference which was held in Delhi from March 23, 1947. Delegates from most of the Asian countries and from the five republics of the Soviet Union met to discuss plans for closer relations among their countries.

Gandhiji told them that they could find the true spirit of India not in the westernized cities but in the 700,000 villages in the country. He reminded them that the founders of all great religions of the world, including Jesus, came from the East. They should, therefore, continue to deliver the message of the East to the West. They should not have any hard feelings for the West which had exploited their peoples but convey their own wisdom to others.

In March, 1947, Lord Mountbatten became the Viceroy. He was the King's cousin and a great-grandson of Queen Victoria. Both Lord and Lady Mountbatten brought a new and fresh spirit to New Delhi. Lord Mountbatten announced that he had come to India to end British rule.

He invited Gandhiji to see him.

Gandhiji, who was then in Bihar, travelled by train (as usual, by third class), although he had been offered a special aeroplane. The two met for over two hours. From that moment began a deep, sincere and memorable friendship between them. In 12 days, they met six times.

The Mountbattens respected Gandhiji. And Gandhiji trusted them and felt that the Viceroy really wanted to help India, even if Britain had to lose her empire.





He was right. But it ~~came~~ about ~~in~~ circumstances he did not really ~~foresee or relish~~. The country ~~was~~ to be partitioned to ~~meet~~ opposing demands. Gandhiji met many leaders, but to no avail.

At a **prayer-meeting**, he explained that the Congress had **accepted** Pakistan, with a division of the Punjab and Bengal. "I am opposed to any division of India... • Nobody can force me to accept it, except God." He said that 32 years of work had come to an inglorious end. "I cannot participate in the celebration of August 15."

The clock struck twelve midnight and a day unlike any other dawned. It was August 15, 1947. India had become independent after 190 years of British rule.

In the great Hall of Parliament House, New Delhi,

Lord Mountbatten read out the official document proclaiming India's freedom. This was followed by cries of joy. Cannons boomed, church bells chimed and train whistles filled the air in joyful greeting of the historic event.

"As the world sleeps," said Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister, "India awakes to a new life."

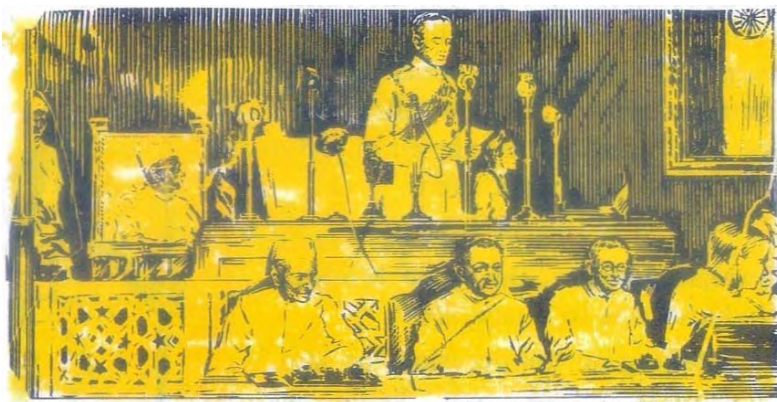
Speaking on the occasion, he said:

"The appointed day has come-the day appointed by destiny-and India stands forth again after long slumber and struggle, awake, vital; free and independent..."

"It is a fateful **moment** for us in India, for all Asia and for the world..."

"We rejoice in that freedom, even though clouds surround us, and many of our people are sorrow-stricken and difficult problems encompass us..."





"On this day, our first thoughts go to the architect of this freedom, the Father of our Nation, who, embodying the old spirit of India, held aloft the torch of freedom and lighted up the darkness that surrounded us...

"Our next thoughts must be of the unknown volunteers and soldiers of freedom, who, without praise or reward, have served India even unto death...

"To the nations and peoples of the world, we send greetings and pledge ourselves to co-operate with them in furthering peace, freedom and democracy.

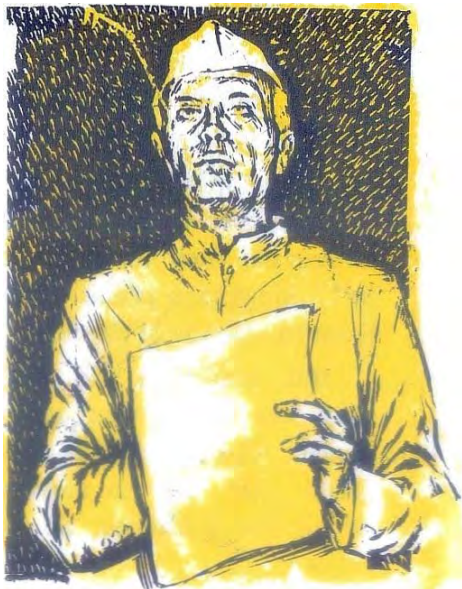
"And to India, our much-beloved motherland, the ancient, the eternal and the ever-new, we pay our reverent homage and we bind ourselves afresh to her service."

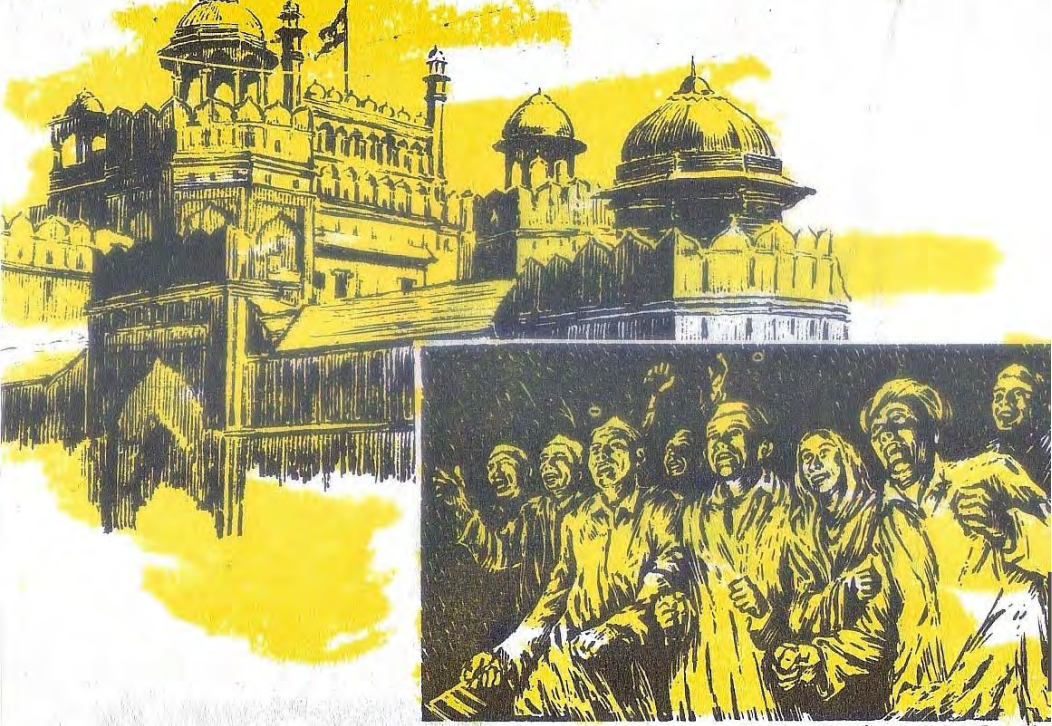
Millions upon millions of Indians celebrated the wonderful victory won without firing a bullet. There were illuminations and decorations all over the land, parades and



processions and music and dancing. **And** there were thousands of flag-hoisting ceremonies.

From the majestic ramparts of the Red Fort in Delhi, the saffron, white and green flag fluttered proudly. Millions had come to Delhi for this great occasion. Many stood in front of the Fort to salute free





India's banner. And the Red Fort had once again become the focal point of living history.

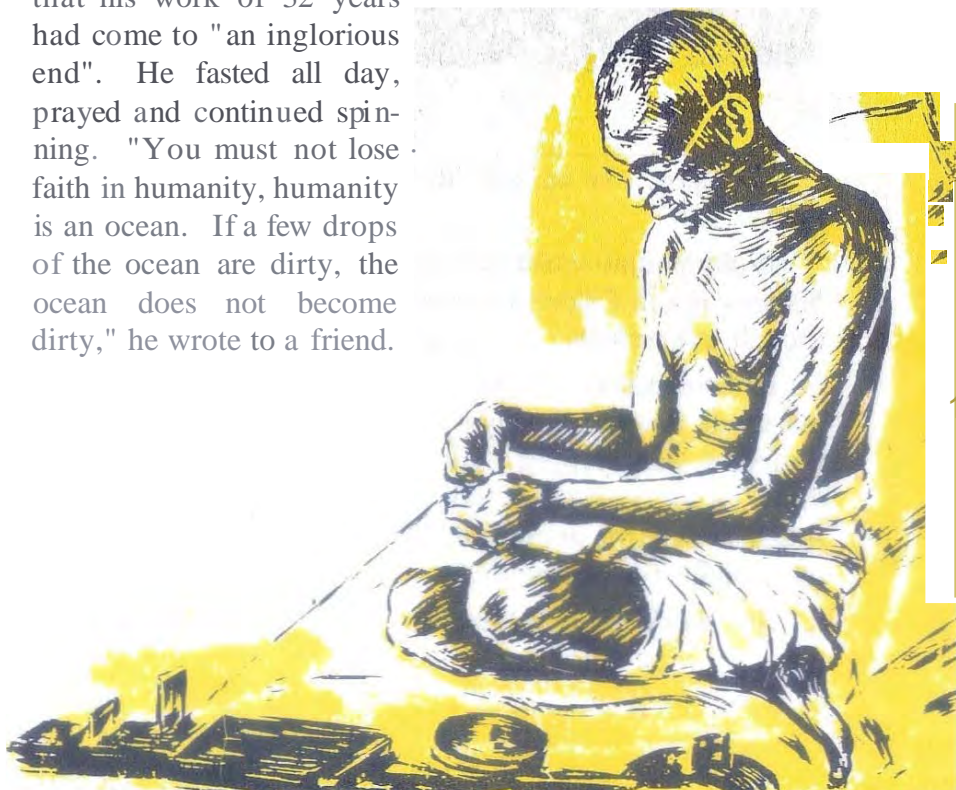
The people were ever **forgiving**. There was no bitterness in their hearts against the British. Lord Mountbatten had conquered their hearts and they shouted "Mountbatten ki jai!" Slogans in praise of the leaders echoed and re-echoed from thousands of throats.

But, one man did not join in; a man who, more than any other, was instrumental in securing independence. Gandhiji had refused the invitation to New Delhi. He sent no message to the nation. In the midst of all the festivities, he was sad. He closed his ears

to all the noise and tumult of the celebrations.

Here was before him not the free, united India of his dreams, but an India divided into two. He had struggled for retaining love between Hindus and Muslims; but one portion of the country had become Pakistan, a Muslim nation.

Gandhiji was unhappy that his work of 32 years had come to "an inglorious end". He fasted all day, prayed and continued spinning. "You must not lose faith in humanity, humanity is an ocean. If a few drops of the ocean are dirty, the ocean does not become dirty," he wrote to a friend.





"O Lord," he exclaimed, "lead us from darkness into light."

In the Punjab violence flared up after independence, but his presence in Calcutta averted serious disorders in Bengal, though temporarily.

By September, riots broke out and Gandhiji resorted to his usual drastic remedy-fasting unto death **unless** the slaughter was stopped. The change wrought was immediate. Lathis, knives and other weapons were thrown aside. A city newspaper announced, "He was ready to die so that they might live peacefully."

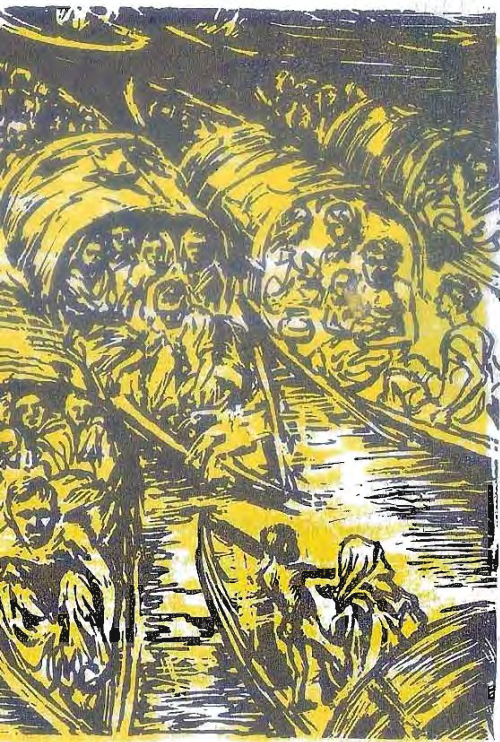
His work accomplished by the end of September,



Gandhiji left for Birla House in Delhi. There on October 2, 1947, his 78th birthday, Lord and Lady Mountbatten went to congratulate him. He had often declared- half seriously, half humorously-that he hoped to live for 125 years, the span of human life according to Hindu tradition. Now he no longer wished to do so. The world around him and all his dreams were shattered.

"I have heard that a convoy of Hindus and Sikhs fifty-seven miles long is pouring into the Indian Union from West Punjab. It makes my brain reel to think how this can be. Such a happening is unparalleled in the history of the world and it makes me, as it should make you, hang my head in shame."







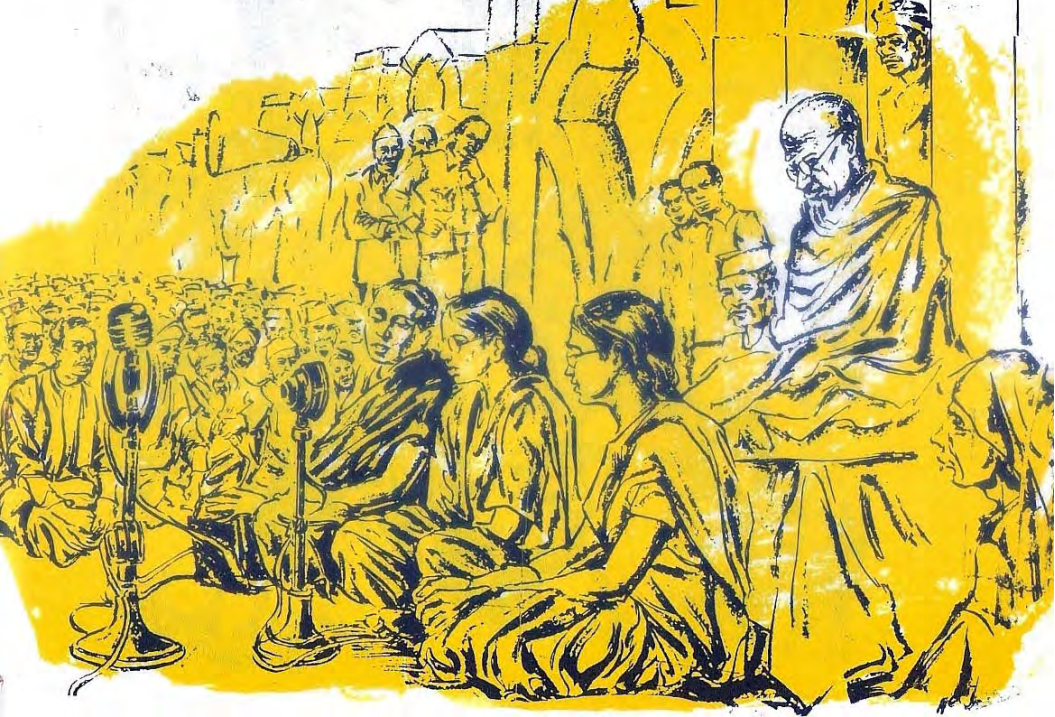
Gandhiji was not exaggerating. The fifty-seven-mile-long convoy was one of the several in the Great Migration in which 15, 000, 000 people walked hundreds of miles, leaving behind them all their possessions. They were now rendered homeless, destitute. From the parts of the Punjab that had become part of Pakistan came millions of Hindus and Sikhs. Similarly, millions of Muslims were fleeing



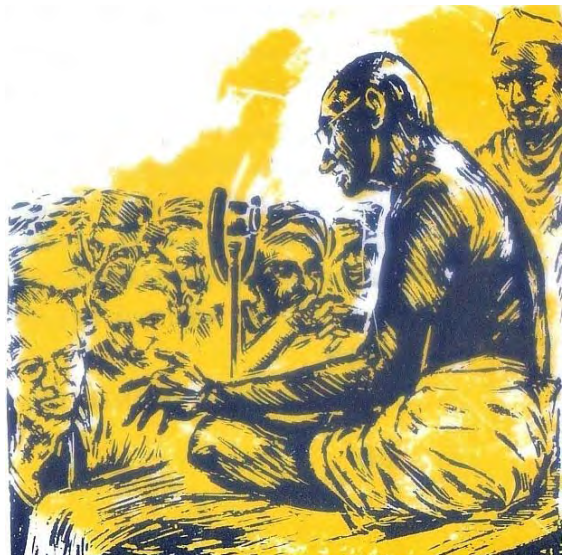
into Pakistan on foot. Sometimes the convoys proceeding in opposite directions clashed, and there were scenes of unspeakable horror. Many who were exhausted, hungry and ill, fell down on the way and died.

Fanatical, communal hatred had rendered men crazy. Gandhiji, however, never lost faith in humanity and God.

He had known dark days of great disappointment, bitter heartbreak, and utter despair. How did he withstand these? He has explained: "Prayer has saved my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago. I had my **share** of the bitterest public and private experiences. They



threw me in temporary despair. If I was able to get rid of that despair, it was because of prayer. It has been a part of my life as truth has been." Further, "I see so much misery and disappointment every day, that if I did not feel the presence of God within me, I would be a raving maniac and I would jump into the Hooghli river."





Gandhiji was now in Delhi, unhappy and disappointed **over** the Hindu-Muslim tension. "I have never put up with helplessness all my life," he said.

Without consulting anyone, he decided to fast unto death. He announced that the fast was directed to the "conscient of all", to the Hindus and Muslims in the Indian Union and to the Muslims in Pakistan. Everyone was alarmed and worked to bring about peace between the two communities and save his life. The Indian Union had delayed the payment of Rs. 550,000,000 due to Pakistan, in the hope that it would be adjusted against money due to India from the latter.

Now at his request, this sum was immediately sent. **In**

his continuing fast, he was growing weaker and his voice could scarcely be heard. Finally, assurances were given and pledges of peace signed by representatives of various parties and Gandhiji was satisfied.

Prayers were said and his favourite hymns sung, after which Gandhiji broke his fast.

Gandhiji held his prayer-meetings regularly and just after his last fast he had to be carried on a chair to the grounds, from the small rear room in Birla House, where he lived. On the second day a loud explosion was heard. It was a bomb that had been thrown at Gandhiji but exploded some distance away, blowing off a portion of the garden wall. Gandhiji remained unperturbed. "Don't worry about it," he said. "Listen to me," he urged. His fast to save and protect the Muslims had angered some people. He had





given strict orders, however, that no one entering the prayer-grounds should be searched.

It was Friday, January 30, 1948, a cold and clear day. Early in the morning, Gandhiji said to his attendant, "**Bring** me all my important letters. I must reply to them today, for tomorrow I may never be."

At ten past five in the evening, Gandhiji left for the prayer-ground. He leaned on the shoulders of Abha and Manu, his grand-nieces. Quickly, he climbed the five small steps to the ground and hastened to the platform.

People rose to greet him. Many were closer to him, some made way for him. Suddenly, a man in a khaki uniform pushed his way forward. As it was already late Manu tried to stop him, but he pushed her away and she fell.

He stopped two feet in front of the Mahatma, made a small bow and, raising a pistol, shot at him thrice in quick succession. One bullet entered Gandhiji's stomach and came out through his back. Another hit his chest and was caught in his lung.

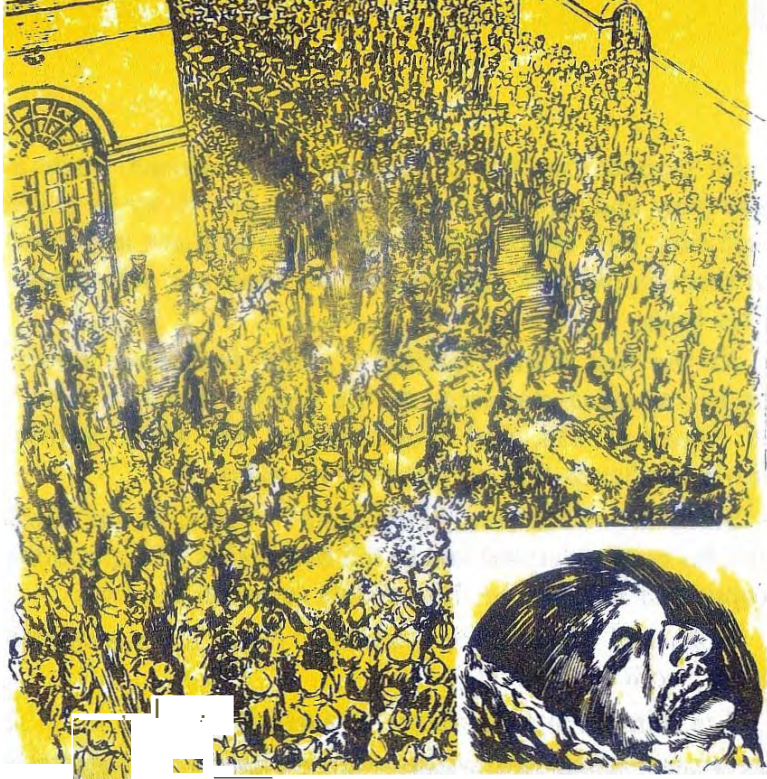
At the first shot, Gandhiji's raised foot came down, but he remained standing. At the second, his face turned the colour of ash, and blood stained his white clothes. Slowly his hands slipped down to his sides.

Softly he called out, "Hey Ram!" Then, at the third shot, his body collapsed and he fell backwards. His spectacles dropped to the ground, his sandals came off his feet.

Abha and Manu lifted Gandhiji's head. He was carried to his room in Birla House.

Ten minutes later; a doctor declared him dead.





Jawahar Lal **Nehru** rushed from his office to Gandhiji's side. Kneeling beside him, he buried his face in the blood-soaked clothes and his body shook with sobs.

It was Pandit Nehru's duty to announce the tragedy. He went to the gates of Birla House to convey the sad news to the people gathered there.

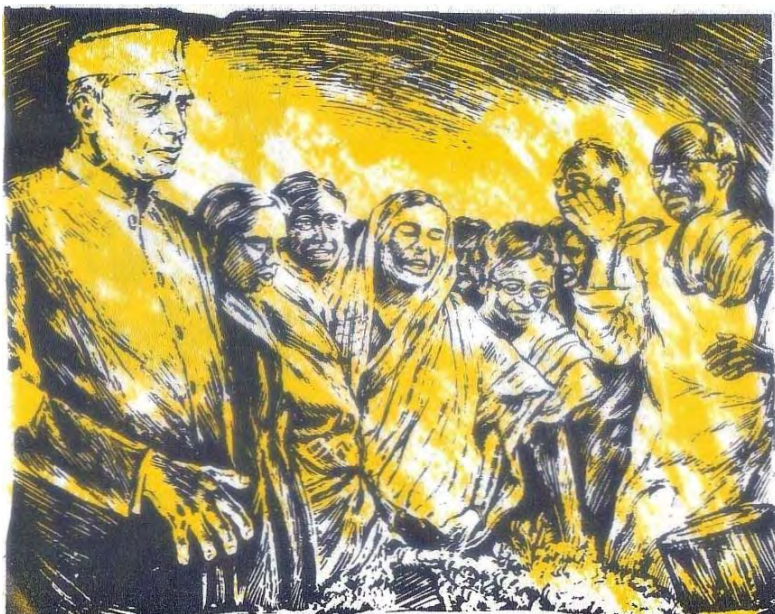
Later that evening, he broadcast to the nation: "The light has gone out of our lives and there is darkness everywhere.] do not know what to tell you and how to say it. Our beloved leader, Bapu as we called him, the Father of our Nation, is no more...."

Gandhiji was cremated the next day. A **five-mile-long**

procession followed his body to the banks of the Yamuna at Delhi. The body was carried on an army gun-carriage, bedecked with flowers. The carriage was draped in the national flag. Six thousand soldiers, sailors, airmen and policemen marched in front and behind. There were a million and a half in the procession, while another million lined the route.

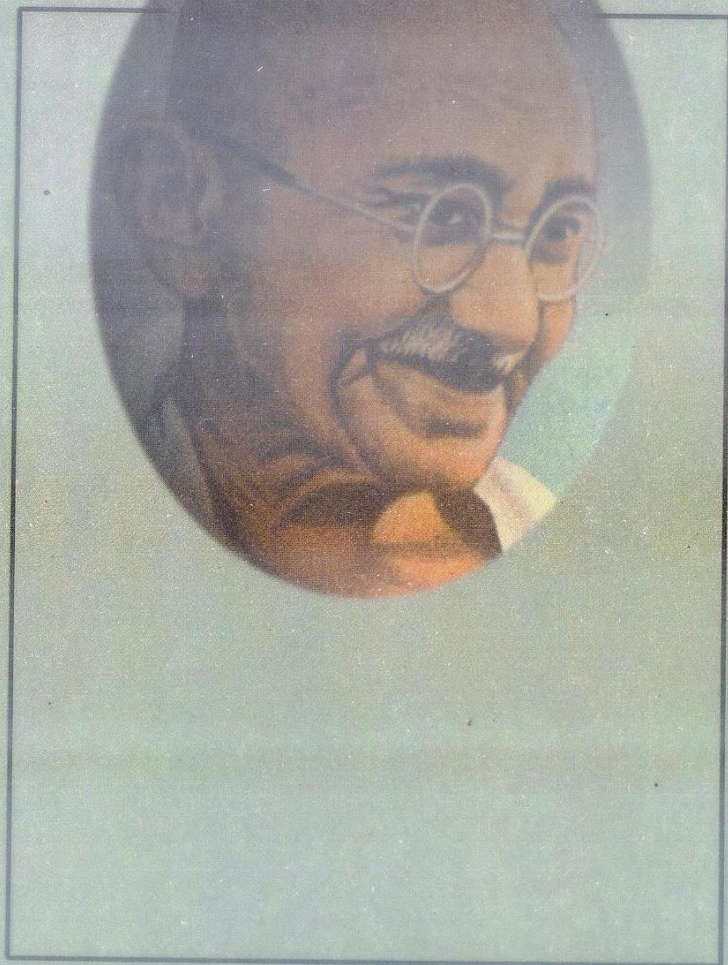
Nehru felt forsaken and forlorn with the heavy burden of the new nation's responsibilities on his shoulders. He would not now have the Father of the Nation at his side to guide him and advise him. Ramdas lighted his father's funeral pyre. It was a most tragic scene. Everyone wept. Groans and wails were heard from the surging crowd. Gandhiji's body was being consumed by the leaping flames and reduced to ashes.

Gandhiji ranks among the greatest leaders of aU time. A philosopher and saint, teacher and preacher, writer



and orator, he was at the same **time** a man of great humility and dynamic action, a friend and father to all. He shook the foundations of the world's mightiest empire, moved with Viceroys and powerful rulers, but with all humility lived like a poor man **with** the "untouchables". His country produced **the** finest of textiles and yet its uncrowned king wore a simple, hand-spun loin cloth. He gave life a true meaning for the millions who followed him and was ever ready to die for them. A frail man, he seemed to possess the strength and stamina of a giant. What sort of man was he? He has been called the greatest Indian after Gautama Buddha. Isn't he even greater? History alone can answer this question.





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